



News Release

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Summer shellfish safety: know the risks and follow safety tips

Public urged to check toll-free hotline or website to find current conditions

OLYMPIA – Summer weather is on its way and the Department of Health wants people to know that before enjoying our state’s shellfish, it’s crucial to find out if any warnings, closures, or advisories are in effect. The state has a toll-free hotline and a website providing up-to-date information on current risks and tips on shellfish safety.

Warm water can increase levels of naturally occurring bacteria such as *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp), which can grow in oysters and make people sick if the oysters are eaten raw. Cooking oysters kills the bacteria, making them safe to eat. And while cooking is an effective way to kill bacteria in oysters, cooking doesn’t eliminate a different kind of shellfish-related risk: the toxin responsible for paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP), which can’t be cleaned or cooked out of shellfish. PSP is extremely dangerous when eaten. You can’t see any of these contaminants in shellfish, making it crucial to keep track of current conditions for shellfish gathering.

“We have wonderful seafood in our state and by taking a few precautions people can continue to enjoy gathering and eating shellfish from our beaches,” said Maryanne Guichard, Assistant Secretary for Environmental Health. “As conditions change, so do the warnings that shellfish lovers should know about. Our website and our toll-free hotline provide the information you need before heading to the beach.”

Shellfish risks and safety information:

Vibriosis:

Cooking shellfish thoroughly is always a good idea, but it’s especially important to cook oysters during the summer, particularly in July and August when vibrio is most active in our region. Vibriosis symptoms may include diarrhea, nausea, stomach cramps, headache, vomiting, fever, and chills. Symptoms usually appear within 12 to 24 hours after infected shellfish is eaten.

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Typically, vibriosis is mild to moderate, with symptoms lasting for two to seven days. It can threaten the lives of people with lowered immunity or chronic liver disease and those who are taking prescription antibiotics, antacids, or H2 block medications.

If you plan to collect oysters, follow these steps to avoid vibriosis:

- Gather shellfish as soon as possible after the tide goes out
- Don't harvest oysters that have been exposed to the sun for more than one hour
- Refrigerate or ice shellfish immediately
- Cook shellfish to at least 145° for 15 seconds
- Rinsing cooked shellfish with seawater can re-contaminate them

Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP):

PSP, also known as “harmful algal blooms,” can't be destroyed by cleaning or cooking. People who eat shellfish contaminated with a toxin such as PSP can become seriously ill or even die. A person cannot tell if the toxin is present by looking at the water or the shellfish. PSP, also known as “red tide,” can only be detected by laboratory testing.

Before gathering shellfish in the state, people should call the Department of Health **Biotoxin Hotline, 1-800-562-5632**, or check [the Marine Biotoxin website](http://www.doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/shellfishsafety.htm).

The [Department of Health website](http://www.doh.wa.gov) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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